

PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.*
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 17

David's thanks to God for his delivery from all his enemies.

1. I will love thee, O Lord, my strength:
2. The Lord is my firmament; my refuge and my deliverer. My God is my helper, and in him will I put my trust. My protector and the horn of my salvation, and my support.
3. Praising I will call upon the Lord: and I shall be saved from my enemies.
4. The sorrows of death surrounded me: and the torrents of iniquity troubled me.
5. The sorrows of hell encompassed me: and the snares of death prevented me.
6. In my affliction I called upon the Lord, and I cried to my God: and he heard my voice from his holy temple: and my cry before him came into his ears.
7. The earth shook and trembled: the foundations of the mountains were troubled and were moved, because he was angry with them.
8. There went up a smoke in his wrath: and a fire flamed from his face: coals were kindled by it.
9. He bowed the heavens, and came down and darkness was under his feet,
(verses continued >)

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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(verses continued from cover page)

10. And he ascended upon the Cherubim, and he flew upon the wings of the winds.
11. And he made darkness his covert, his pavilion round about him: dark waters in the clouds of the air.
12. At the brightness that was before him the clouds passed, hail and coals of fire.
13. And the Lord thundered from heaven, and the highest gave his voice: hail and coals of fire.
14. And he sent forth his arrows, and he scattered them: he multiplied lightnings, and troubled them.
15. Then the fountains of waters appeared, and the foundations of the worlds were discovered: at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the spirit of thy wrath.
16. He sent from on high, and took me: and received me out of many waters.
17. He delivered me from my strongest enemies, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me.
18. They prevented me in the day of my affliction: and the Lord became my protector.
19. And he brought me forth into a large place: he saved me, because he was well pleased with me.
20. And the Lord will reward me according to my justice; and will repay me according to the cleanness of my hands:
21. Because I have kept the ways of the Lord; and have not done wickedly against my God.
22. For all his judgments are in my sight: and his justices I have not put away from me.
23. And I shall be spotless with him: and shall keep myself from my iniquity.
24. And the Lord will reward me according to my justice; and according to the cleanness of my hands before his eyes.
25. With the holy, thou wilt be holy; and with the innocent man thou wilt be innocent:
26. And with the elect thou wilt be elect: and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted.
27. For thou wilt save the humble people; but wilt bring down the eyes of the proud.
28. For thou lightest my lamp, O Lord: O my God, enlighten my darkness.
29. For by thee I shall be delivered from temptation: and through my God I shall go over a wall.
30. As for my God, his way is undefiled: the words of the Lord are fire tried: he is the protector of all that trust in him.

(verses continued >)

49. "Therefore will I give glory to thee, O Lord, among the nations, and I will sing a psalm to thy name." Therefore, for this reason, "I will give glory;" that is, with praise will I acknowledge thy favors, not privately, but openly before the whole body of the people, that all may learn to put their trust in the Lord.

50. "Giving great deliverance to his king, and showing mercy to David his anointed: and to his seed forever." May God increase and multiply safety of body, soul, and all other things beside, to the king he hath chosen; and may he deal everlasting mercy to David who has been ordered by him to be anointed as king, and to all his successors forever. Which prayer was fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord, who reigneth, and will reign for all eternity. Amen.

END OF PSALM 17

43. "Thou wilt deliver me from the contradictions of the people: thou wilt make me head of the Gentiles." That had been done already; for, before he wrote this Psalm, he had been delivered from the "contradictions" and rebellion "of the people;" and "was made head of the Gentiles;" that is, became master of the kingdom. We are, therefore, to suppose him using the future tense for the past, a thing usual in the Hebrew, or he insinuates a continuation of past favors of that sort.

44. "A people, which I knew not, hath served me: at the hearing of the ear they have obeyed me."

45. "The children that are strangers have lied to me: strange children have faded away, and have halted from their paths." He had just reason for asking "to be delivered from the contradictions of his people," having met with more fidelity and allegiance from some of the Gentiles, than from the children of the people of Israel. A prophecy manifestly applying to Christ, rejected by the Jews, acknowledged by the Gentiles. "The people which I knew not:" the Gabaonites, the Gethei, and others whom I knew not as brothers, "served me:" "at the hearing of the ear they have obeyed me," at once, most promptly, the moment they heard the command. "The children that are strangers;" that is, the degenerate in their morals, "lied to me;" that is, deceived me, gave me sham obedience. "They have faded away;" fallen from me like dried leaves; that is, they have not behaved properly and fairly by me; alluding to the rebellion of Absalom, under the son of Bochrus, and others, "and have halted from their paths." The children of adultery, who give sham service, "halt from their paths;" that is, turn from the straight path, in which they should have walked.

46. "The Lord liveth, and blessed be my God: and let the God of my salvation be exalted." A conclusion of praise. Now, it appears that the Lord does live, and as he lives, so may he always live; and "let the God of my salvation be exalted."

47. "O God, who avenges me, and subdues the people under me, my deliverer from my enemies." May that God who avenged the injuries offered me, and subdued the people who rebelled against me, and delivered me from the plots and attacks of my raging enemies, Saul and Absalom, be exalted.

48. "And thou wilt lift me up above them that rise up against me: from the unjust man thou wilt deliver me." A prayer for the continuation of the divine favors; namely that he may be so "lifted up above them that rise up against him," that they may struggle in vain when they cannot possibly reach so high, and thus, that he may be delivered "from the unjust man."

(continuation of verses)

31. For who is God but the Lord? Or who is God but our God?
32. God who hath girt me with strength; and made my way blameless.
33. Who hath made my feet like the feet of harts: and who setteth me upon high places.
34. Who teacheth my hands to war: and thou hast made my arms like a brazen bow.
35. And thou hast given me the protection of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath held me up: and thy discipline hath corrected me unto the end: and thy discipline, the same shall teach me.
36. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me and my feet are not weakened.
37. I will pursue after my enemies, and overtake them: and I will not turn again till they are consumed.
38. I will break them, and they shall not be able to stand: they shall fall under my feet.
39. And thou hast girded me with strength unto battle; and hast subdued under me them that rose up against me.
40. And thou hast made my enemies turn their back upon me, and hast destroyed them that hated me.
41. They cried, but there was none to save them: to the Lord, but he heard them not.
42. And I shall beat them as small as the dust before the wind; I shall bring them to naught, like the dirt in the streets.
43. Thou wilt deliver me from the contradictions of the people: thou wilt make me head of the Gentiles.
44. A people, which I knew not, hath served me: at the hearing of the ear they have obeyed me.
45. The children that are strangers have lied to me: strange children have faded away, and have halted from their paths.
46. The Lord liveth, and blessed be my God: and let the God of my salvation be exalted.
47. O God, who avenges me, and subdues the people under me, my deliverer from my enemies.
48. And thou wilt lift me up above them that rise up against me: from the unjust man thou wilt deliver me.
49. Therefore will I give glory to thee, O Lord, among the nations, and I will sing a psalm to thy name.
50. Giving great deliverance to his king, and showing mercy to David his anointed: and to his seed forever.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 17

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "I will love thee; O Lord, my strength." "I will love thee;" having made me beholden to thee, by so many acts of kindness. What these favors were he explains, first in one word, then in several, then in detail. In one word, when he says, "my strength;" the source of all the strength that enabled me to triumph over my enemies.

2. "The lord is my firmament, my refuge, and my deliverer. My God is my helper, and in him will I put my trust. My protector and the horn of my salvation, and my support." What he expressed in one word, "my strength," he now explains by several words, "my firmament, my refuge, my deliverer:" as if he said: I may justly call him my strength, when he is all the above names to me. When I lie down, he is my firmament; when I am in danger, he is my refuge; should I fall into the hands of the enemy, he will deliver me; and thus, in every respect, he is my strength and my courage. "My God is my helper, and in him will I put my trust: my protector and the horn of my salvation;" In the height of his affection to God, he repeats the epithets he used in the preceding verse, "my helper, my protector, and the horn of my salvation;" which correspond to "my firmament, my refuge, and my deliverer." His "helper," because he keeps him upright, prevents him from falling, (rock being the derivation of the word in Hebrew,) according to Psalm 39, "He set my feet upon a rock;" and he therefore most properly adds, "in him will I put my trust" as being the surest of all foundations. "My protector" in the Hebrew, "my shield," to protect him from his enemies: "the horn of my salvation:" a most familiar expression in the Scriptures, to signify the power or means of salvation; being a metaphor, taken from horned animals, who use their horns for protection; thus, in Psalm 131, "I will bring forth a horn to David." I will make David all powerful to conquer his enemies; like a rampant bull, with his horns full grown, and not like a sluggish calf, that has not yet got them. Ezech. 29. "In that day a horn shall bud forth to the house of Israel." Mich. 4, "I will make thy horn iron." Luke 1, "He hath raised up a horn of salvation to us." God, then, is called a "horn of safety" to David, and to all the just, because through him they are powerfully armed against their enemies, by putting their strength not in themselves, but in the divine help and assistance; in the spirit of the apostle, "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me." The expression, "horn of safety," corresponds with, "and any deliverer," for God delivers us through the "horn of safety:" that is, through his own saving power. Finally, the word, "my support," comprises all the rest, and corresponds to "my strength:" for whosoever God supports, he frees, protects, and confirms.

36. "Thou has enlarged my steps under me; and my feet are not weakened." He proceeds to relate his victories, attributing them all to God; you have made me advance at a rapid pace in enlarging my kingdom, and I am not yet tired.

37. "I will pursue after my enemies, and overtake them: and I will not turn again till they are consumed."

38. "I will break them, and they shall not be able to stand: they shall fall under my feet." These expressions, spoken in the future time, do not belong to it, but to the past tense, as will appear from the following verse.

39. "And thou hast girded me with strength unto battle; and has subdued under me them that rose up against me." Hence it appears the Prophet in the two preceding verses spoke of the past. As I said, "I will pursue after my enemies and overtake them:" God helped me to do it, for "He girded me with strength" to fight, and "subdued under me;" that is, made those fall, "that rose up against me." "Girding with strength" is a common expression in the Scripture; thus, in Psalm 64, "Being girded with power who troublest the depths of the sea;" and, in Psalm 92, "The Lord is clothed with strength, and hath girded himself;" and, Isaias 51, "Put on strength, O thou arm of the Lord;" and, finally, in Luke 24, "But stay you in the city till you be endowed with power from on high." He gives him to understand that as strength and courage are of more value in a battle than the sword and helmet, the praise of the victory should be given more to the giver of the former than of the latter.

40. "And thou hast made my enemies turn their back upon me, and hast destroyed them that hated me." He returns to the same thing over and over, attributing the flight of his enemies to God's interference entirely.

41. "They cried, but there was none to save them: to the Lord, but he heard them not." Another cause of the victory assigned, for God not only heard his prayers, but he refused to listen to those of his adversaries, though they put them up to him.

42. "And I shall beat them as small as the dust before the wind; I shall bring them to naught, like the dirt in the streets." He speaks now of the remnant of his enemies. I have conquered them; but if any handful remain, I will crush them into the smallest pieces, and scatter them as dust is carried before the wind; and sweep them from the earth, as the mud of the streets is hurried along by a vehement wind.

32. "Who hath girt me with strength; and made my way blameless." He now comes to mention in particular the gifts he got from God, by means of which he got freed from his enemies, and got possession again of his kingdom. He places strength and innocence first, two virtues rarely united, for the strong are always too ready to injure the weak. David, however, was truly strong, yet truly innocent, so much so, that even though it was in his power, he would not slay his enemy Saul.

33. "Who hath made my feet like the feet of harts: and who setteth me upon high places."

34. "Who teacheth my hands to war: and thou hast made my arms like a brazen bow." He gives the particulars of the expression, "Girt me with strength," by telling us how God bestowed on him wonderful agility in his feet, dexterity in his hands, and strength in his arms. The feet of the stag were not more nimble in topping the highest mountains, as he expresses it, "In setting himself upon high places;" as he proved, when in his flight from Saul, he was obliged to shelter in the highest and most inaccessible tops of the mountains. He adds, that his hands were trained to battle; and that he had arms of brass, to signify his strength and skill in military matters, of which there can be no doubt, if we only read the First and Second Books of Kings. The stone from his sling, fixed in the very head of Goliath, bears testimony to his dexterity, as do the bears and the lions killed by the mere strength of his arms.

35. "And thou hast given me the protection of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath held me up: and thy discipline hath corrected me unto the end: and thy discipline, the same shall teach me." He declares now his innocence, of which he had already spoken, when he said, ver. 32, "Thou hast made my way blameless;" for, as God was pleased to give him the grace of living blameless, he, therefore, constantly protected him; "Thou hast given me the protection of thy salvation;" for the celerity of foot, the dexterity of hand, and strength of arm against the king and his whole army would have been of little value, had he not had "The protection of salvation" too, that is, the divine protection to save him and "the right hand (of God) to hold him up," and support him. "And thy discipline hath corrected me to the end, and thy discipline the same shall teach me." This, too, goes to show the innocence or "the blameless way" of David. I not only had the benefit of your protection, but your discipline; that is, your knowledge, which is had from the study of your law, so directed me, that I could not go astray; and when there was fear I might stray, by studying and inspecting it diligently "I got corrected," set right, and so persevered to the end. "And thy discipline the same shall teach me." By such discipline we may also understand the correction of a father, in which spirit God sometimes chastised David by temporary calamities, when, through human frailty, he would fall into some defects.

3. "Praising I will call upon the Lord: and I shall be saved from my enemies." A conclusion from the preceding. I will, therefore, constantly praise God for so many benefits received; and in my difficulties, with unbounded confidence, will I apply to him, certain of being delivered from all manner of enemies.

4. "The sorrows of death surrounded me: and the torrents of iniquity troubled me."

5. "The sorrows of hell encompassed me: and the snares of death prevented me." He now enters, in detail, on God's favors to him. He was in manifest danger of death, when Saul was lying in wait for him, to kill him, which danger he describes in various metaphors. "The sorrows of death surrounded me." I was surrounded by so many dangers, that I despaired of my corporal safety; and, therefore, depressed with the grief and trouble of mind, incident to those whose death is at hand; "and the torrents of iniquity troubled me:" The grief and trouble above named, from the number, that like a torrent invaded and "troubled me," after the manner of those who are hurried down, and whirled about by a roaring torrent. "The sorrows of hell encompassed me," a repetition of the first part of the preceding verse, with the substitution of "hell" for "death." They are, however, synonymous, for before the death of Christ, all went to hell, though not the same part of it; and, therefore, death and hell meant the same; the sorrows of hell, then, mean such sorrow as those usually suffer who are about to depart from this world to the next; "and the snares of death prevented me:" a repetition of "the torrents of iniquity troubled me." For, as David was troubled with the "sorrows of death," by reason of the multitude of wicked ones rising up against him, so "the snares of death" that "prevented" [encompassed] him, was the cause of the pains of hell to him. By the "snares of death," he means the conspiracies of the wicked against him; and thus the meaning of the two verses is that David, reflecting on his imminent danger of death, from the open invasion of his enemies rushing on him, like a roaring torrent, carrying everything before it—as well as from the conspiracies of the same enemies, in lurk for him, with snares, as for the unwary — was in great trouble.

6. "In my affliction I called upon the Lord, and I cried unto my God: and he heard my voice from his holy temple: and my cry before him came into his ears." Having told the extent of his danger, he now says that he had recourse to God through prayer, and that he was heard. "In my affliction." In the height of my troubles from Saul's persecution, and in many similar troubles, "I called upon the Lord," in whom I am wont to put my entire confidence; "and I cried to my God." A repetition in much use with David. "And he heard my voice from his holy temple." My prayer reached the very summit of heaven, which is the temple of God; not made by human hands; truly holy, and can neither be violated nor polluted; "and my cry before him came into his ears." A repetition, and to some extent an explanation, of the preceding verse; as much as to say, my importunity bursting forth with great affection, poured forth in his sight; that is, poured forth by me, with God before my eyes, has been heard.

7. "The earth shook and trembled: the foundations of the mountains were troubled and were moved, because he was angry with them." The effect of having been heard by God, for he received such help from him against his enemies as enabled him to master and destroy them, and get possession again of his kingdom. The anger of God towards his enemies is most poetically described, for as the entire kingdom is in confusion when the king is angry, and makes preparation for war; so, when the King of the whole world is angry, the whole world is confused; and especially the three visible elements, earth, air, and water. He does not mean to imply that these three elements were actually confused, though the words seem to mean so much; but he means to tell us that such is God's anger, that it can rock the earth to its very foundations; that it can cause in the air constant storms, dark clouds, thunder and lightning; and lastly, that it can so dry up the fountains, and the rivers, and the sea itself, so as to expose the caverns and the sources of the fountains. Beginning with the earth. "The earth shook and trembled; the foundations were troubled, and were moved, because he was angry with them." When God is angry with the earth, every bit of it shakes and trembles, not only on its surface, but to its very center. And such concussion ensues not only when God is angry; but also when he makes known his presence on earth, for the earth is then in fearful reverence, acknowledging the majesty of the Creator. Thus, on the Resurrection of Christ, there was a great motion of the earth; the same happened at his death; and in another Psalm we read, "At the presence of the Lord the earth was moved." "Because he was angry with them;" not with the earth and the mountains, but with the people living thereon, and that by reason of their sins.

8. "There went up a smoke in his wrath: and a fire flamed from his face: coals were kindled by it." A further explanation of God's action on the earth, when he chooses to show his presence thereon, making the earth not only to tremble, but even to smoke and to burn, which, Exod. 20 and Heb. 12, tell us happened when he gave the law on Mount Sinai, "There went up a smoke in his wrath;" that is, in his anger he kindled such a fire on earth that created an immense smoke, "and a fire flamed from his face;" heat and smoke were accompanied by a destructive fire; "coals were kindled by it;" the anger of God made it burn so as to turn the whole earth into live coals, as he says in another place, Psalm 103, "Who looketh on the earth, and makes it tremble: who touches the mountains, and they smoke."

9. "He bowed the heavens, and came down: and darkness was under his feet." Passing from the earth to the air, he shows what happens there when God wishes to manifest his presence or his anger. God is said to bow the heavens when he lets down a cloud in which he appears. The clouds ordinarily appear a part of the heavens, and it is in a cloud God was wont to show himself, as appears from Num. 9, Kings 3:8, Matt. 17, and in other places. "He bowed the heavens, and came down;" this means, he let down a cloud, and showed himself in or through it; "and darkness was under his feet." God dwelt in the cloud, as if he had darkness under his feet; all metaphorical expressions, to give us to understand that God may be present without one seeing him.

28. "For thou lightest my lamp, O Lord: O my God, enlighten my darkness." Having spoken highly of his own justice and purity, he now points out their sources; and, therefore, praises God, especially as it was from him he had light, strength, and every other virtue. "For thou lightest my lamp, O Lord:" from thee I have the beginning of all good, which is light to distinguish true happiness from false, and true evils from false ones; for the first wound inflicted on human nature by original sin, was ignorance of the real good; and, therefore, the first cure begins by divine light; "Thou lightest my lamp:" you alone light up the interior eye of my heart. "O my God, enlighten my darkness." Father of lights, the true light, in whom there is no darkness, as you have hitherto lighted up the inward eyes of my heart, proceed now to enlighten my darkness by banishing it completely. For without the grace of God to enlighten us, all is pure darkness in our hearts, so far as supernatural mysteries are concerned.

29. "For by thee I shall be delivered from temptation: and through my God I shall go over a wall." The particle "for" is frequently redundant in the Psalms, so is the particle "and," which requires to be noted, that a connection with something foregoing may not be looked for. The Prophet having said that he had got from God that light, that is, the beginning of good works and true justice, now adds, that he got also courage and strength to do or to avoid those things such light prompted him to. "By thee I shall be delivered from temptation." Relying on thy assistance to strengthen me, I will overcome all temptation, and conquer all evil; "Through my God I shall go over a wall." Depending on the same divine assistance, and strengthened from the same source, I will accomplish everything, however difficult, were it even the surmounting of a lofty wall.

30. "As for my God, his way is undefiled: the words of the Lord are fire tried: he is the protector of all that trust in him." The reason why he has received so much light and strength from God, and why he so confides in him, is because God is true, good, and the protector of all that confide in him; and because he is the only true God, true Lord, from whom such things can be expected. "His way is undefiled;" that God of mine, whose way is undefiled, who is most holy, and acts most justly. "The words of the Lord are fire tried." As gold is tried and proved in the fire, so the promises of the Lord are most certain and proved.

31. "For who is God but the Lord? Or who is God but our God?" Another reason for confiding in him, for expecting light and strength from him, he alone being our true God. Whence we learn that our God alone is the true God, and as such that he is the true, firm, and solid rock in which we may safely confide and rest; and all who confide in any other thing must of necessity be deceived and confounded.

Is not this presumption? Why trumpet so his own merits? There is no presumption when the thing is done with sincerity, and God acknowledged to be the author of all our merit. Nehemias did so, so did Esdras, Ezechias, Isais, and Esther. But how could David make such assertions? He who had been guilty of murder and adultery! He who exclaimed, Psalm 18, "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord;" and, in Psalm 113, "For in thy sight no man living shall be justified." This objection leads some to think that David does not speak absolutely of his own justice, but of the justice of his cause, as compared with that of his enemies; others will have it that he limits his justice to his having remained in the true faith which his enemies did not, but the expressions, "Because I have kept the ways of the Lord;" "All his judgments are in my sight;" "I shall be spotless with him," are adverse to these opinions. We must only say, then, that David upholds his justice, inasmuch as he always had a sincere desire of serving God, and a firm purpose of never violating his law, and should he chance to slip, that he at once repented, and sincerely returned to God. The expression, "Who can understand sins?" may be understood of venial sins that are not inconsistent with justice; and the words, "For in thy sight no man living shall be justified," may be understood of that justice which man may have independent of grace. For in such manner can no man be justified, for the just are only so through God's sanctifying grace.

25. "With the holy, thou wilt be holy; and with the innocent man thou wilt be innocent:"

26. "And with the elect thou wilt be elect: and with the perverse thou wilt be perverted." A reason for his having said he would get according to his justice from God, because God gives to every one according to his works. He speaks to God here, "With the holy thou wilt be holy;" with the pious and the merciful thou wilt deal kindly and mercifully. To the man who is innocent that is, who doth no injury, thou wilt do no injury, nor permit others to do it. "With the elect thou wilt be elect;" with the sincere and pure minded, (for such is the meaning of the Hebrew,) you will deal sincerely and candidly; "And with the perverse thou wilt be perverted:" he who showeth not mercy shall not meet with mercy from you; who harms shall be harmed by you; who acts not honestly, but roguishly, him will you similarly deal with.

27. "For thou wilt save the humble people; but wilt bring down the eyes of the proud." He explains the two last verses, as if he said: "With the holy, thou wilt be holy; and with the innocent thou wilt be innocent:" because "Thou wilt save the humble people;" that is, because humility, the guardian of all virtues, is most pleasing to you, and to all humble souls you give your grace, but, "with the perverse thou wilt be perverted;" because you "will bring down the eyes of the proud;" that is, because pride, the queen of vices, is highly displeasing to thee, and, therefore, you always raise up the humble, and level all the proud. He makes special mention of the eyes here, because it is in them and the eyebrows that pride mostly shows itself.

10. "And he ascended upon the Cherubim, and he flew upon the wings of the winds." He goes on describing God's action on the air, when he means to display his anger to man. He brings before us God in the shape of a man in arms, on a chariot, moving with the greatest velocity, and discharging his weapons against his enemies. The clouds are his chariot, according to Psalm 103: "Thou makest the clouds thy chariot, who walkest upon the wings of the winds." The swiftest winds are his horses, who carry the clouds hither and thither. His weapons are the lightning that he shoots from the clouds. A truly wonderful description! No chariot lighter than the clouds, no horse fleetier than the wind, no weapons compared to the thunder of heaven. The chariots, too, fight from a vantage ground, whence they can harm without being harmed. "He ascended upon the Cherubim;" that is, God uses not only the clouds as a house or tent, but he uses them as a chariot, with the Cherubim as charioteers, and the winds as his horses. He is said "to ascend upon the Cherubim," and "to fly on the wings of the winds:" that we may understand that he is not governed by, but that he governs the charioteers; and that he is the principal mover and guide both of the chariot and its driver. These expressions hold too, because God used the services of the angels in moving the clouds, which are a sort of aerial and most rapid chariots, as being drawn by the winds, a sort of winged quadrupeds, and, therefore, instead of walking, fly, and that are fleetier than any bird.

11. "And he made darkness his covert, his pavilion round about him: dark waters in the clouds of the air." Lest it may be supposed that God appeared visibly in the clouds, as he would in a chariot, he says he was invisibly present, and for that purpose made use of dark clouds, as a symbol of his being invisible. There is in these words a most elegant and poetic metaphor. "He made darkness his covert." God so wrapped himself up in the dark clouds, that he lay as if in a hiding place, the dark clouds acting the part of a screen to him. "His pavilion round about him," the same clouds being like a tent round about him, covering him on all sides. "Dark waters in the clouds of the air," the tent above named being a dark cloud, as dark as those fully charged with rain, and when so dense and aqueous, may not improperly be called "dark waters in the clouds of the air."

12. "At the brightness that was before him the clouds passed, hail and coals of fire." A description of the celestial warfare from the clouds, as if they were the armed chariots of the Deity. At the word of God the cloud opens, hail and lightning, like red hot coals, are at once projected. "At the brightness that was before him, the clouds passed." Beautiful! The clouds burst by reason of the brightness of the latent Deity, as if they could not stand such brightness, and therefore burst and dissolve in his presence, vanish and pass away. "Hail and coals of fire" issue forth in abundance from the rupture. It happened in Pharaoh's time, Exod. 9, "and the hail and fire mixed with it drove on together." The same happened in Josue's wars against the five kings, Jos. 10, and on various other occasions.

13. "And the Lord thundered from heaven, and the highest gave his voice: hail and coals of fire." A repetition of the above in different language. The cloud bursts, the dreadful crash called thunder is heard, generally followed by the thunderbolt. It is elegantly styled "His voice," not only because God alone can produce or emit it, but because the sound is so great and so terrific, that to God alone it should be attributed as his own voice. Hence, God himself says to Job, 40, "If you have an arm like God, and if you thunder with like voice." And the highest gave his voice," from which proceeded hail and lightning like red hot coals.

14. "And he sent forth his arrows, and he scattered them: he multiplied lightnings, and troubled them." An explanation of the preceding verses, particularly of the words, "coals of fire." These coals of fire were sent out on the bursting of the clouds, because God "Sent forth his arrows," meaning his lightning. "And multiplied" them, and in such manner "Scattered and confused his enemies."

15. "Then the fountains of waters appeared, and the foundations of the world were discovered: at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the spirit of thy wrath." God's wonderful action on the waters next. They were suddenly and miraculously dried up. It happened in the Red Sea, and in the Jordan, as we read in Exod. 14, and Jos. 4, on which occasions the bottom of the sea and of the river was exposed; which bottom is called here "The foundations of the world," because they are so much lower than the surface of the land. "The fountains of waters appeared." At God's bidding, the waters were dried up, and then appeared the bottom of the fountains, and of the rivers, and of the sea; and thus "The foundations," or the lowest parts of the earth, "Were discovered." "At thy rebuke, O Lord." What dried them? God's rebuke—his order. How did he rebuke them? "At the blast of the spirit of thy wrath." A metaphorical and poetical appellation of the wind, through whose agency, God in his anger, and for the purpose of rebuke, dried up the waters; for the Scripture tells us, Exod. 14, that it was by a scorching wind that the waters of the Red Sea were dried up. Thus, what he might have simply expressed as follows, You, Lord, by a most powerful wind, dried up the waters of the sea; he expresses in a more elegant and figurative manner, when he says, You rebuked the waters for hindering the passage of your people; you blew on them in the spirit of your wrath, and at once they fled; as he expresses it in Psalm 113, "What ailed thee, O sea, that thou didst flee?"

16. "He sent from on high, and took me: and received me out of many waters." He now returns to relate God's kindness to him in delivering him from his enemies. From the seventh verse to the present, he dwelt entirely on the power of God; and as he commenced by saying, "The torrents of iniquity troubled me," and spoke in the foregoing verse of God's spirit drying up the waters, so as to expose the bottom of the sea, and of the rivers, following up the same metaphor, he says now, "He sent from on high and took me." He reached out his hand from on high to the very depth of the torrent, and "Took me," and thus brought me out from "Many waters;" that is to say, rescued me, drowned and overwhelmed in a multiplicity of troubles.

17. "He delivered me from my strongest enemies, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me." What he said in a metaphorical sense in the last verse, he now explains in ordinary language; the words, "they were too strong for me," must be taken in an imperfect sense, according to St. Jerome; for he assigns a reason why he had more need of the assistance of God, as his enemies were stronger than himself.

18. "They prevented me in the day of my affliction: and the Lord became my protector." God's goodness acknowledged again. My enemies, without any provocation, were the first to injure me; attacked me off my guard, "prevented," (that is, surrounded,) me without my knowing it; but the Lord was watching for me, and rendered all their machinations harmless.

19. "And he brought me forth into a large place: he saved me, because he was well pleased with me." Again and again he brings up his delivery. To show how deeply God's goodness was fixed in his mind. "He brought me into a large place." When I was anguished in a place where I may be easily overcome he brought me into "a large place," where I may roam about at pleasure, having my enemies at a distance. "He saved me because he was well pleased with me." My salvation from so many imminent dangers was all owing to his immense mercy in so loving me. For though David presently will put his own merits forward, he well knew that these very merits are God's gratuitous gifts.

20. "And the Lord will reward me according to my justice; and will repay me according to the cleanness of my hands:

21. "Because I have kept the ways of the Lord; and have not done wickedly against my God.

22. "For all his judgments are in my sight: and his justice I have not put away from me.

23. "And I shall be spotless before him: and shall keep myself from my iniquity.

24. "And the Lord will reward me according to my justice; and according to the cleanness of my hands before his eyes." Having praised God for having delivered him from his enemies, he now adds that his delivery will be always sure to him, not only through mercy, but even through justice, because he not only hitherto did, but for the future will, lead the life of the just. For God, just in himself, loves, helps, and protects the just, "will reward me according to my justice." Having done so heretofore, he will continue to reward me according to my merit, "And according to the cleanness of my hands." As I feel my justice not only in my heart but in my hands; that is, to just within and without, just in my heart, just in my actions, so God will reward me before himself and before men, and will guard me within and without.